What We Heard

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Campus Alberta Message from the Minister

Campus Alberta is an exciting concept. It is the idea that Albertans will have access to a barrier free learning system where education providers collaborate to deliver quality lifelong learning – where and when Albertans need it – to address their social, cultural and economic needs.

Over the past year, we have received valuable input from stakeholders and expanded the Campus Alberta concept to reflect the vision and goals of the Ministry of Learning.

The Campus Alberta Symposium, which was held on October 10th and 11th, strongly reinforced the idea that Alberta is very ready for the Campus Alberta concept. The feedback from the discussions held at the symposium echoed the idea that we have a strong foundation which will certainly pave the way for this initiative. This symposium brought together representatives from Alberta's learning system who will now develop plans of actions and help to provide the tools necessary to make Campus Alberta a reality.

This symposium has given us the chance to take a look at some of the things we can do to better define Campus Alberta and implement it on a system-wide level. As well, this symposium and the ideas generated provides us with the information to help define what can be done throughout the community to make Campus Alberta a success.

I would like to thank all participants who were a part of the Campus Alberta Symposium. The time and commitment provided here will prove to be beneficial to further relationship building across our learning system.

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Introduction

This report documents the outcomes of *Campus Alberta Symposium: Results Through Collaboration* hosted by Alberta Learning October 10-11, 2000 in Edmonton. The symposium brought together nearly 180 representatives of Alberta's learning system to discuss how to further streamline our learning system ensuring it is open and accessible to all Albertans. *What We Heard* is devoted primarily to summarizing the suggestions, comments and other input from participants. Most information is presented in terms of key themes and trends. Included in *What We Heard* are brief summaries of keynote addresses and panel discussions. This document also outlines the process used to collect input from participants.

Campus Alberta: A Brief History

Campus Alberta is a major initiative to make learning opportunities even more flexible and responsive to the needs of learners. Premier Klein first described the concept in his February 1999 televised address and called it a "campus that stretches right across the province." That vision was initially fleshed out through input from Alberta's adult learning community, which highlighted priorities like system coordination, course transferability and ways to build on existing strengths. With the creation of Alberta Learning, Campus Alberta now encompasses all learning partners, from educators in the basic and post-secondary systems to industry and community partners across the province.

What's Next?

Alberta Learning is committed to working with the many partners in the learning system to help make the vision of *Campus Alberta* a reality. The ministry will use the input from the symposium to develop the overall policy framework for Campus Alberta. The ministry has used this feedback gathered through the symposium to refine 2001-2004 business plan strategies and initiatives. Actions are already underway in several areas discussed by symposium participants. For example, Alberta Learning will be working with partners and stakeholders to examine ways of enabling and sustaining access to quality learning programs in sparsely populated rural communities. Alberta Learning, Innovation and Science and other partners are implementing a high-speed internet network for the learning system. As well, the ministry will be working with stakeholders and partners to increase awareness of newly emerging occupations.

Part 1: Setting the Stage

Program Overview

The symposium took place over one evening and a full day. Following is a brief summary of the program:

DAY 1

Welcoming remarks – Honourable Dr. Lyle Oberg
- Dinner and keynote speaker – Dr. Jeannette Vos

DAY 2

- Welcoming remarks – Maria David-Evans and overview of process
- Morning plenary panel discussion (4 panelists presented on "Collaboration in Action")
- Morning breakout sessions (Topic 1 – 10 groups, 1.5 hours each)
- Afternoon breakout sessions (Topic 2 – 10 groups, 1.5 hours each)
- Wrap-up and farewell – Honourable Dr. Lyle Oberg

The symposium also featured a showcase exhibit of best practices in collaboration.

Presentations in Brief

Following are brief summaries of speaker comments and presentations.

Honourable Dr. Lyle Oberg, Minister of Learning

Dr. Oberg expressed his strong support of Campus Alberta and emphasized the need to keep the interests of the learner at the centre. We need a system with full transferability and ease of movement for the student. He also challenged participants to work collaboratively on new ways of delivering quality learning and to realize that there is no need for Alberta's learning partners to compete with *each other*. There is enough competition coming from *outside* the province.

Maria David-Evans, Deputy Minister, Alberta Learning

Ms. David-Evans encouraged participants to work toward the goal of a seamless provincial learning system. Restructuring Education and parts of Advanced Education and Career Development into Alberta Learning is making it easier to realize the dream of Campus Alberta. Ms. David-Evans cited several examples of collaboration among learning partners around the province. Alberta is in an excellent position to better meet learner needs through a seamless system. Technology will help a great deal, however, we want a "high-touch, high-tech blend." Rapid advancements in technology will require us to keep pace with skills, to learn, to unlearn and relearn. Alberta already has an excellent reputation globally. The Alberta name has cachet and we need to keep it that way. As Albert Einstein said, we don't need to think more, we need to think differently.

Jeannette Vos, Educator and Author

Dr. Jeannette Vos is an internationally respected educator with over 30 years experience in all levels of schooling – from preschool to university. She is currently based in the United States and is co-author of the book, *The Learning Revolution.* This work formed the basis of Dr. Vos' presentation.

Dr. Vos' hypothesis is that we are in the midst of a revolution both in terms of our ability to pursue lifelong learning and in the way we actually view learning. We live in the first "era in human history when our species' entire heritage of knowledge, wisdom and beauty is available to each of us virtually on demand." Dr. Vos cited 15 trends that she believes will shape the future of learning. These include communications technologies, a new age of leisure, miniaturization, women in leadership, an active aging population, and the "triumph of the individual." Whether in the school, home or workplace, learners today have access to myriad learning opportunities. Dr. Vos spoke of learning organizations and provided examples from the real business world. Dr. Vos also cited examples of innovative school-and community-based learning models both in North America and internationally.

Very central to Dr. Vos' presentation was the need to recognize that individuals possess different intelligences, including logical intelligence, linguistic intelligence, musical intelligence, physical intelligence, spatial intelligence and emotional intelligence. There are "many kinds of smart" and opportunities must be provided for all types of learners. Educators must tap into the multiple intelligences. All people are potentially gifted. We must work to blend the "best of the new and the best of the old."

DAY TWO – PANEL DISCUSSION – MODERATOR'S COMMENTS

Darwin Eckstrom, President, College of Alberta School Superintendents

Darwin Eckstrom is also Deputy Superintendent of Peace-Wapiti School District No. 33. He discussed how the theme of collaboration strikes everyone at all levels of education. He spoke of "collaborative synergy" and how it is impossible to operate in isolation. A seamless learning system is the key to a strong society. Dr. Eckstrom cited several examples of collaborative partnerships in his school district, especially those intended to help students explore career options. Among the initiatives mentioned were the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP), the Green Certificate Program, and tech prep. All of these partnerships have created synergy among students, business, staff and administration.

Paul Byrne, President, Grant MacEwan College

Paul Byrne is also the Chair of the Council of Presidents, Colleges & Technical Institutions. He described Campus Alberta as a concept that cannot be mandated but is rather, an attitude toward change. We must also recognize that the learning system does indeed have seams. Our task in collaboration is to ensure the barriers are not apparent to the learner. We have to enter new ventures and look at easing transitions. We have to look at very basic issues such as transferability. Dr. Byrne cited examples of institutions and other partners working

collaboratively to improve service in the community. He also shared his view that Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can encourage high quality performance. However, they can also work against the spirit of cooperation. There are exciting things ahead. The point is to consider activities that will benefit learners and allow them to move ahead.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION: PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Alberta North (Tom Thompson)

Alberta North is an example of a culture of collaboration. It is a group of six colleges and one university in Northern Alberta who has come together to find solutions to develop curriculum that best suits the needs of students in their town or hamlet. Alberta North has led to 50 Community Access Points (CAPs) that are connected to one another. Transportation is a huge challenge in the north. The CAP sites are now using 87 different collaborating partners. Each site has a coordinator who is responsible for career information and assessment, student finance assistance, information on becoming a successful student, admissions, processing tuitions, various library support, and assistance, e-mail, audio conferencing and many other activities. Alberta North gives learners from all over the region the opportunity to access quality learning and training using shared information.

Working Group on Admissions and Transfer Issues (Judith Hughes)

The Working Group was presented as a model of collaboration. Dr. Hughes described the role, function and composition of the working group. The working group is composed of members from Alberta's post-secondary institutions. Its main purpose is to identify transfer and admissions issues that need immediate attention and deliver results. Smaller groups will also be formed to deal with issues needing a longer response time. For example, subgroups have now been formed to address admissions, transferability, grade conversion, and application forms. Dr. Hughes also described the major outcomes to date for each subgroup.

Library Association of Alberta (Andrew Waller)

Mr. Waller described examples of collaboration within Alberta's library community. For example, the Library Association of Alberta has 120 library information science members who work together to put on countless educational activities across the province. In the broader library community, among primary and secondary libraries, along with public libraries, the spirit of collaboration is deeply ingrained. In some communities, the school library *is* the public library. Libraries work with many other groups to provide access to materials and programs. Most academic libraries are members of consortia that work together while maintaining their independence. A typical activity for these consortia is ensuring access to electronic databases.

Careers the Next Generation (Tom Nisbet)

Careers the Next Generation (CNG) is a collaboration among businesses, communities, parents and schools to help students make smoother transitions from school to work. It helps young people learn about the skills employers are seeking through a variety of activities

including workshops and summer internships. In 1999-2000, over 15,000 students participated from 72 communities in CNG workshops across the province. 400 students worked in summer internships. Apprenticeship and Industry Training is a key partner in Careers the Next Generation. Through programs such as RAP (Registered Apprenticeship Program), it works with the community, industry, schools and other CNG partners to give youth the opportunity to explore careers in the trades.

Telus Learning Connection (Catherine Kullman)

The Telus Learning Connection (TLC) brings industry and education together. The TLC Team uses a cascade model and works with over 250 teacher leaders to facilitate the effective use of education and communication. Support to teacher leaders includes mentorship in-service, support and financial backing for release time to work in communities. The spirit of TLC lies in teachers working in their communities with their colleagues. The program is building on recently developed ICT provincial infrastructure. TLC will also support teachers in implementing Alberta Learning's new ICT program of studies, launched in September 2000. A major TLC activity is creating an on line community of sharing with the most significant resource being the website: www.2learn.ca. The site has 2.5 million hits per month and holds 103,000 pages of resources including 100,000 annotated hyperlinks. A major goal of the website is to help parents access resources at the student level and embrace the notion of lifelong learning.

Part 2: Small Group Work

Process Overview

In order to facilitate the development of actions relevant to local needs and concerns, the participants were divided into 10 small groups based on geographical location:

- Calgary #1
- Calgary #2
- Edmonton #1
- Edmonton #2
- Fort McMurray Area
- Grande Prairie Area
- Lethbridge
- Medicine Hat Area
- Northern Alberta
- Red Deer Area

Facilitators asked the breakout groups a series of questions on each of two topics: System Coordination and Ensuring Quality Learning Opportunities. The goal of the discussions was twofold. First, they laid the foundation for later decision-making by identifying challenges, gaps and concerns, contributing factors and what was working well. Then, based on these discussions, participants were asked to identify and agree on priority actions. Breakout groups were also asked to develop actions that could be taken at a local level.

What We Asked

Topic 1: System Coordination

- What do we mean when we say "system coordination"?
- What are some of the challenges facing us when we try to collaborate and coordinate a system?
- What factors contribute to effective collaboration and coordination?
- Acknowledging the challenges and conditions needed to work together in a collaborative and coordinated way, what specific actions do we need to take to enhance system coordination at the local level and system-wide?
- Which actions have system-wide application?
- Which pieces could be applied at the local level?
- From the top three strategies, which actions should be undertaken first?

Topic 2: Ensuring Quality Learning Experiences

- What specific factors (circumstances) positively and negatively affect a person's ability to have quality lifelong learning experiences?
- What's working well in terms of collectively responding to these factors?
- Where do you still see gaps in our overall ability to deliver quality learning experiences?
- As a lifelong learning community, what specific actions (at a local level and system-wide) can we take to collaborate on and ensure quality lifelong learning experiences?
- Which pieces have system-wide application?
- Which pieces could be applied at the local level?
- From the top three strategies, which actions should be undertaken first?

Part 3: What We Heard

Topic 1 – Enhancing System Coordination

WHAT DO WE MEAN?

Many participants defined "system coordination" as sharing common goals and language while working together toward a common vision for the common good. They said system coordination involves many partners, each with unique roles. The focus is coordination and communication among these partners and creating a system where there may be seams, but they are invisible to the learner. Coordination means joining forces to avoid duplication, sharing resources and knowledge, ensuring *all* learners have a chance to learn, and breaking down barriers. It means building trust, making compromises and the setting aside of ego and competition. System coordination expands choices and embraces the entire learning system. It ensures that there are links between K-12 through to post-secondary learning and beyond. System coordination allows learners to move more freely among learning opportunities and receive appropriate credit.

Some participants believed the *learner* should be the focus, not the "system." Others defined system coordination as the opportunity for individuals or individual institutions to express their uniqueness while engaging in collaborative environments.

CHALLENGES IN COLLABORATION

When asked what challenges we faced in collaboration, many pointed to the current funding structure. They believe that it forces learning partners to compete rather than cooperate and creates further inequities. Many cited turf protection and lack of trust as further impediments. Institutions have different cultures, histories, roles and objectives. Some institutions may want to keep their "elite" status while others are reluctant to buy-in to the collaboration concept. Society as a whole may also have difficulty changing its mindset and the attitude that you have to be in a certain system or institution to learn. Institutions are not the only players in the "business" of education.

Other participants commented on the costs of course development and the need to protect intellectual property, ensure quality and continue to foster creativity. Lack of time, resources, distance, geography and the sheer size and complexity of the learning system also make it difficult to collaborate and respond to changing needs. The economy of the community can also have a significant impact on opportunities to collaborate.

Several participants cited the absence of infrastructure, communications vehicles and a clear, consistent vision for collaboration. We don't have the necessary "bridges and ladders" in place. Others asked whether we even need collaboration. Several commented that the benefits of collaboration must be clear to all. They agreed that the benefit to the *learner*, not the system, must be especially clear.

WHAT SUPPORTS COLLABORATION?

What factors contribute to effective collaboration and coordination? Symposium participants had a variety of answers.

Many agreed that adequate, sustained funding supports collaboration. Partners need equal access to resources, including technology and information. A positive attitude and commitment to collaboration as well as clearly defined benefits also make collaboration work well. Many suggested incentives for collaboration among Alberta's learning partners. Players should be rewarded for sharing ideas, information, knowledge and resources. Others agreed that collaboration depends on having strong leadership, good communication and a shared vision with a common language and actionable goals. Partners must work together in an environment of trust and mutual respect. Collaboration works well when it is self-directed by the partners rather than imposed from outside. Partners must also be willing to "think outside the box" and take risks. Some suggested "dabbling" with partners who pose no threat and creating solidarity within Alberta by viewing rivals and competitors as "outsiders." One group pointed out that "the trades" must be included in discussions about collaboration. Participants concurred that effective collaboration needs adequate measures and agreement as to what "winning" means.

Many commented that positive examples of collaboration abound. If the needs of the learner come first, then there are many opportunities for innovation and collaboration.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

After some discussion and processing, participants were asked to develop priority actions. They were further asked to identify those that could be applied on a system-wide basis and those that could be implemented locally.

Following is a summary of the key actions identified by participants.

Actions For The System

Most actions were considered to have system-wide implications. They are grouped according to general themes.

Vision And Goal Setting

Several participants felt that the Campus Alberta concept needed a vision and goals in order to be truly effective and collaborative. They look to the Ministry for leadership in setting a clear mandate that identifies roles and responsibilities of all partners, including "disincentives" for failing to comply. Others called for the development of long-term strategic plan to guide collaboration within the Alberta learning system; they wanted to know "what are we to collaborate on?" Another proposed action is to establish guiding principles for lifelong learning.

Funding

A number of participant groups believed that increased funding for the learning system as a whole would go far to support collaboration. Others felt that the current funding model and KPIs supported competition and should be revised to provide incentives for collaborative efforts. There was support for building on existing collaborations, ensuring funding was long-term and finding other ways to reward, recognize and celebrate such efforts.

Other suggested actions include:

- Redefining the success and reward system within K-12 so that it is primarily driven by the local board,
- Providing more money for a common infrastructure for Internet delivery, and
- Allowing funding to follow students between secondary and post-secondary learning.

Access

Ensuring equal access to learning opportunities was a priority for many participants. A common theme was that the learner - not the system - must be the focus of any collaborative efforts. Participants also felt that we can respond to the needs of learners by providing flexibility in design, structure and overall program delivery. Learners should also be asked about their own learning needs and goals.

Other suggested actions include:

- Creating clear and open "pathways" for students to meet desired outcomes, including how to get necessary skills and knowledge,
- Establishing a system-wide data-base on training opportunities,
- Developing materials sensitive to Aboriginal learners,
- Establishing flexible campuses better suited to learners, and
- Creating a centralized source on admission and program requirements (a "Campus Alberta Calendar.")

Continuity/Portability

This relates to the access issue. Several participants wanted to simplify overall access to learning opportunities. They called for greater portability and transferability through a variety of means, including:

- Establishing common grading systems,
- Setting minimum portability standards,
- Identifying outcomes for post-secondary courses, and
- Fostering a better public understanding and overall strengthening of the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) system and prior credits.

Others believed that there had to be better continuity between the basic and post-secondary learning systems. They recommended central coordination of learning technology and the development of a common bank of courses similar to that used in the basic learning system.

Alberta North

One group recommended that *Alberta North* be evaluated for its potential as a provincial model of collaboration. The group further called for the creation of a network of community learning centers for coordinating resources for K-12, post-secondary and lifelong learners.

Local Actions

Some groups felt that there was already a great deal going on at the local level. Examples of local activities included a tech prep program involving colleges, school districts and business, and a sophisticated business network that has been working to promote education and learning.

Groups did agree, however, that more could be done. Participants identified several actions that could be implemented to foster collaboration at the local level. Actions are grouped according to three key themes: *Information Sharing, Planning,* and *Resources.*

Information Sharing

Overwhelmingly, groups concurred that an important first step was to expand the scope of involvement and meet with the relevant players within the community or region. They agreed that they should "get to know" the different organizations and players. Such players included school districts, post-secondary institutions (and their boards and senates), educational consortia, other learning providers, employment centers, career counselors, and business and industry. Participants thought it important to first share information from Campus Alberta, including their own recommendations, and then discuss possible next steps for collaboration. Others thought it important to demonstrate the benefits of collaboration, including examples of best practices.

One group intended to expand its zone "administrative meeting" to include all education partners. They also intended to set up for significant student input. Another group recommended establishing a formal learning agreement between the two regional colleges and the region's school district boards. They believed that this could help end the "two solitudes" between the basic and post-secondary learning systems. Another group thought it important to bring faculty and students together to enhance collaboration efforts.

A number of groups wanted to get political involvement and agreed to pursue meetings with their local MLAs, as well as other leaders and political organizations. Such meetings would provide an opportunity to discuss issues facing the learning system, including those related to funding. One local group planned to take its list of actions to Alberta Learning while another wanted the ministry to host another meeting or focus group to discuss specific recommendations from the Symposium.

Planning

Many agreed that communities and regions must develop a long-term strategic plan for collaboration, including a vision, guiding principles and goals. One group intended to set CRAM (clear, realistic, achievable, measurable) goals for their region. Another believed that a model of collaboration could be developed and used for joint actions.

Resources

Participants agreed that learning partners must determine what resources are actually available within their regions and communities. One group planned to conduct a needs assessment (a "town hall type meeting") to help determine local requirements and direction.

There must also be a commitment to resources for collaborative efforts. Some participants thought it possible to share infrastructure between the basic and post-secondary institutions in their area. Such infrastructure could include libraries and human resource (HR) support. Other participants thought local partners could work together to fast track applications and the collection of statistics. Another group thought that timely, relevant, technology in-servicing could be provided at the community level. Some participants thought that institutions should be encouraged to involve local residents in learning activities. They cited a recent event hosted by the business faculty of the local college.

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

How can technology support the priority actions?

Many participants believed that technology[1] was an "enabler" rather than the critical factor in making collaboration work. They viewed the actual relationships among the various learning partners as the real key to success. Others stated that without more resources, technology would do little to improve system collaboration.

However, participants did agree that technology has a role in a variety of areas and can indeed foster collaboration and communication. Some believed that technology could prompt us to rethink the traditional roles of institutions, instructors and other players in the learning system. Technology could reduce duplication and promote access by providing consistent, high-speed access for learners and providers across the province. Technology also has the potential to create a truly learner-centered model. Many talked about technology in terms of "possibilities." Such possibilities included:

- Establishing a best practices demonstration site including a chat room or other information-sharing platform,
- Province-wide licensing of electronic data, indexes, journals, etc.,
- Using the Request for Proposal (RFP) approach and advertise for expertise in solving technical issues,
- Reviewing and accrediting third-party course development,
- Establishing one Alberta library system model,

[1] For the purposes of the Campus Alberta Symposium, "technology" is defined as information and communications technology or "ICT."

- Enabling student tracking from K-12,
- Developing standardized software, and
- Developing learner "smart cards."

Technology could also enable the development of a digital database for on-line learning as well as reporting on outcomes. It can be a common delivery tool and enable the submission of forms and central registration. Several participants would like to see more career development and education information available on-line. They cited the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) as a good platform on which to build such a resource.

What We Heard

Topic 2 – Ensuring Quality Learning Opportunities

FACTORS IN LIFELONG LEARNING

What factors affect a person's ability to have quality lifelong learning?

Many participants identified factors that were tied directly to the individual learner. They agreed that people must have the basic necessities of life – food, clothing, shelter and good health - in order to pursue lifelong learning. They must have the financial resources to learn. Learners also must have support from their families, communities and cultural group. Those with parents who value learning are more likely to become lifelong learners, as are people who simply know what learning opportunities are available. Several participants believe that individuals must be ready to learn and have the determination, drive and emotional intelligence to continue learning. The learner should also be able to see the benefit and rewards of the learning. What's in it for me? Is it worth the risk? If it is employment related, would there be work when I'm done?

Society's view of learning was also considered important. Participants agreed that we live in a society that values lifelong learning. We have a sense of pride in education and support it in a variety of ways. All of these can positively influence a person's decision to pursue lifelong learning.

Time, location, geographic distance and other factors can also determine whether a person is able to take advantage of learning opportunities. What is their family situation? Do they have children? Do they have a car or bus pass? Many participants agreed that learning opportunities must consider basic access and address the differing circumstances and learning styles of individuals. Time, location, geographic distance should not be barriers to learning. The structure of traditional institutions may make it difficult for people to learn. Several concurred that technology can play a role in providing opportunities more suited to individual needs and circumstances.

Several participants were concerned about the recognition of prior learning and transferability issues. If individuals do not receive credit for their earlier work or are not able to transfer their credentials, they may be reluctant to continue their learning.

The availability of quality learning opportunities was raised by a number of participants. This includes having great, inspiring teachers, quality teaching methods and a positive learning environment with good resources. Some pointed out that schools must do more to promote career awareness.

The role of employers in supporting lifelong learning was also discussed. Participants agreed that business must move toward trying to retain its knowledgeable and skilled employees. Staff may find it difficult to take time off or get the funding to pursue further education. Business must step back and adopt "enlightened" management principles.

GAPS

Participants were asked to identify gaps in our overall ability to deliver quality learning experiences.

Many agreed that adequate funding for the system as a whole to money for technology infrastructure, transportation and childcare, is essential for the delivery of quality learning. There is a tendency toward one-time funding. Individual learners themselves may also lack adequate financial and other resources. Basic needs are not always met. Some feel there is too little assistance for middle income or "B+" students.

Several participants talked about transfer and portability issues, prior learning assessment, flexibility, and assessing outcomes of learning. Applied math was highlighted as an example of a program which didn't live up to expectations and requires work to ensure a smooth transition. Some identified the need for universities to develop "best practices." Others called on partners to think outside institutional walls and move to more flexible, responsive learning delivery models. Participants said it is essential to stop protecting turf and take an integrated, community-based approach and learn to address all learning types more appropriately. Traditional learning is not for everyone. Participants said we must break the myth that "seat time" is learning time.

Participants said there continues to be a gap between learning opportunities for rural and urban learners. People in remote areas face economic barriers and may not have access to technology. There is considerable turnover of teachers in rural Alberta and no apparent succession planning. Getting specialty teachers into rural communities is also a challenge. This can lead to limited program choices, particularly at the high school level. Some commented that there were out dated "1950s" programs due to lack of infrastructure.

A number of participants discussed the problems with current career counseling practices. They agreed that more choices have to be presented, including the trades and technologies. There was also concern that counselors are too busy dealing with crises to focus on providing career information. Students are not always aware of the connection between work and lifelong learning. The system is not always ready to respond to the labour market. For some, there may not even be jobs when they graduate. Other jobs go unfilled. One group pointed to the paradox of asking students to choose one career while expecting them to realize that they will have multiple careers. Several participants agreed that students must "learn to learn" rather than focus solely on learning for work. A number of participants thought there was too little being done to promote and support the trades as a viable career option. Rural areas in particular have a shortage of entry-level trades training.

Gaps in programming and support for Aboriginal learners were identified several times over. Aboriginal learners continue to be under-represented among high school graduates. More needs to be done to assist Aboriginal people and members of other cultural groups to access learning opportunities. Some perceive the system to be geared to the elitist sector rather than high-risk groups and special needs learners. At the same time, there are concerns that the system cannot truly "be all things to all people" and necessarily maintain standards.

Support for older learners was also identified. Perhaps there is too much focus on learning for jobs? Informal learning also needs support, as do flexible delivery options. Participants agreed we need to develop a learner based system and cultural attitude. There is a lack of incentive to overcome the inertia and become involved in lifelong learning. Potential learners, including those at the high school level, may stay away because they are afraid of the risk, or reluctant to lose paid employment. This can widen the gap between the "haves" and "have nots."

WHAT'S WORKING WELL?

Symposium participants were asked to describe what is working well in terms of collectively responding to the supports for, or detractors from, lifelong learning.

There was strong agreement that many things are working well. There are more opportunities than ever to learn and we live in a society that supports lifelong learning. Learning is offered in schools, post-secondary institutions, libraries, museums, and an array of other settings. Program delivery and curriculum development is more flexible and responsive to the needs, circumstances and learning styles of individuals. Traditional institutions are changing their infrastructure to offer greater access to both credit and non-credit learning. Technology supports a variety of learning platforms, including on-line programming and distance education. More Albertans have personal computers, or access to computers, and can take advantage of the many opportunities.

Learning partners are collaborating. There are community partnerships such as Community Adult Learning Councils and Community Consortia that work together to create new opportunities for learning. The apprenticeship model was cited as another positive example of collaboration. The Red Seal Program allows tradespeople to move freely around Canada. Local Advisory Committees (LACs) and Provincial Advisory Committees (PACs) collaborate on apprenticeship and industry training issues and help the system respond to industry needs.

Partnership programs such as RAP (Registered Apprentice Program) and CNG (Careers the Next Generation) help bridge the gap between school and work. School and work transitions are also aided by knowledgeable counselors, career education in schools and work experience programs. The Alberta Transfer Guide aids transitions between institutions. More is also being done in the early years, especially the 0-5 years age group. Teachers and other partners are working to build the self-esteem and confidence of children.

Credit was also extended to government for its overall leadership and for funding a wider range of learning options. Some pointed to student assistance, the Alberta Opportunities Bursary (AOB), and other financial supports for learners as examples of positive collaboration by government. Employers were also credited with supporting lifelong learning in their organizations. Professional associations and other groups are also providing learning opportunities to their members.

Learning providers are also becoming more sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal learners. Schools and communities are providing training in Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal communities are taking action.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Similar to the process used for Topic 1, participants were asked to develop priority actions. They were again asked to identify those that could be applied on a system-wide basis and those that could be implemented locally. It should be noted, however, that not all groups took this step.

Following is a summary of the key actions identified by participants.

Actions For The System

Most actions were considered to have system-wide implications. Like the actions for Topic 1, they are grouped according to general themes.

Support For Lifelong Learning

Many agreed that lifelong learning must be promoted, encouraged and supported. This means recognizing that learning has many forms and removing barriers and creating pathways to learning throughout the lifetime. Participants also believe that learning involving collaborations among different partners must be supported both philosophically and financially. Some called on Alberta Learning and Alberta Community Development to support the learning that is available through libraries, museums and other community organizations. Community partners who share resources and institutions that provide non-credit learning should also be supported and rewarded. One group recommended using the library model of resource sharing. Participants agreed that there must be more promotion of the many learning opportunities in Alberta.

Other actions to support lifelong learning included:

- Providing in-servicing to learn the "craft of teaching" to other community resource people (e.g. artists, business, Elders)
- Validating *all* learning experiences (English vs. ICT, science vs. humanities)

Access

Many agreed that it was essential to ensure access for all learners by eliminating barriers, sharing information and resources, and by providing flexible, creative opportunities for learning. For example, access could be improved in rural and Aboriginal communities through mobile delivery of learning opportunities.

Several participants talked about transferability within the context of access. Their recommended actions included:

- Establishing a system-wide approach to Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) and transfer credit issues,
- Fast-track completion of the ICT provincial network,
- Increasing transferability of courses at the post-secondary level,

There were several very specific recommendations around access and system coordination. These include:

- Developing a consultation process for the development and implementation of new and alternative modalities (for example applied math),
- Creating more flexibility at later stages of high school, and
- Changing the rigidity of university entrance requirements (e.g. applied math.)

Participants also suggested several actions related to the role of technology in ensuring access. These included:

- Establishing infrastructure for a virtual campus,
- Addressing emerging gap between technology "haves" and "have nots",
- Making e-learning technology available, and
- Using the Alberta internet structure to "level the playing field" for 0-5 education.

Support for Learners

Many actions centered on providing support for learners themselves. Some called on partners to treat all learners "as if they were our own." Participants recommended dealing with student debt, increasing financial support through loans and providing relocation subsidies for post-secondary students. Others recommended smaller classrooms and that the first four years of post-secondary education be free of charge.

Special needs students also have issues. Some called for the establishment of a task force to explore learning for the "less successful." They also recommended meeting with Aboriginal leaders. Others support funding for pilot projects such as Headstart and adult literacy programs to provide a foundation for lifelong learning.

Other suggested actions aimed at supporting learners include:
- Helping students to make career choices through better training of guidance counselors,
- Providing counselors with good career information, and
- Funding school districts for program staff.

Funding

Many of the actions - explicitly or implicitly - called for increased funding and enhanced resources. For example, some called on government to fund the training, development and retention of new workers, particularly in certain occupations (e.g. nursing and teaching.)

Local Actions

What can be done at the local level to ensure that quality learning opportunities are available?

Many groups reiterated comments and actions from Topic 1. Participants thought it was important to share information about Campus Alberta and discuss possible next steps. They wanted to hold meetings with the various players in their communities and regions. One group repeated its intention to expand its zone "administrative meeting" to include all education partners. They also want to set up for significant student input. Groups also wanted to get political involvement and agreed to pursue meetings with their MLAs and other political leaders. Participants also talked about formulating strategic plans at the local level. As mentioned under Topic 1, such plans would identify values, guiding principles, goals and objectives.

Groups also identified many other actions that could be undertaken at the local level, including:
- Hosting a regional meeting of admissions representatives and counselors to raise public awareness,
- Sharing information from the applied research partnerships,
- Expanding on good practices such as the portal used by the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfers (ACAT),
- Developing a climate that encourages a love for learning,
- Sharing course curriculum and materials,
- Establishing career centers in high schools,
- Developing quality learning resources,
- Collaborating on the training and development of teachers (among various levels),
- Lobbying collectively to improve lot of lifelong learner,
- Convening a regional meeting of public sector leaders to determine common applications for a consolidated ICT (Information and Communications Technology) business plan, and
- Returning to the community and applauding the work of colleagues that fosters partnerships and collaboration.

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Several groups reiterated their comments from Topic 1. First and foremost, they agreed that technology[2] is an enabler and must be used in conjunction with other actions to support quality learning. We still need to "use paper" and have "meetings of real people." As well, not all people have access to or use ICT. The system must recognize that the goal is still education; the technology should be invisible. When it is used, technology must be monitored to ensure its suitability to learning. We need high standards for on-line delivery and content as well as trained professionals to deliver such programs.

Technology can enhance communications by creating virtual communities, overcoming geographical barriers, increasing participation and supporting collaboration. Technology can reduce duplication, foster teamwork and be used to provide local in-services. ICT can support the development of on-line databases, courses, and bring learning to more students.

Many agreed that technology must be available to all learners and all partners in order to create a level playing field. People need to be more aware of the technological resources that already exist. Some believed that government should provide a common technical infrastructure to support collaboration and delivery while building on the strengths of individual institutions. They further agreed that government should also fund an Alberta on-line consortium.

Despite their words of caution, participants agreed that technology has a role in lifelong learning and could support some positive actions including:

- Keeping Hire-a-Student open year-round in schools, and
- Improving ALIS by keeping it current and enhancing information on demand, salaries and career choice.

Some felt that technology could also be used to bridge the gap between education and industry by actions such as:

- Connecting students with mentors from industry using single website interface, and
- Creating a partnership pool where companies could express interests and highlight opportunities.

[2] Ibid.

Appendix

Participants

The 180 Campus Alberta participants included representatives of the following:

Adult Learning

- Provincially-funded post-secondary institutions
- Faculty Associations
- Post-secondary students
- Other post-secondary stakeholders

Basic Learning

- School zones
- Stakeholders
- Parents
- Students

Apprenticeship and industry training system

- Industry
- Apprentices

Government

- MLAs
- Provincial Government Ministries

Educational Technology

- Associations

Industry

- Associations

CONTACT INFORMATION:

If you wish to provide information to the department or add your name to a department mailing list, please refer to the information below:

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